

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 7687

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CO

SUBJ: ALVARO GOMEZ NOMINATED AS CONSERVATIVE PARTY CANDIDATE

SUMMARY. AS EXPECTED, ALVARO GOMEZ HURTADO WAS NOMINATED SEPTEMBER 14 BY THE CONSERVATIVE CONVENTION AS HIS PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. DESPITE HIS ACCLAMATION, THE PARTY SUFFERS FROM POTENTIALLY SERIOUS DIVISIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. BY THE TIME THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONVENTION CONVED IN BOGOTA ON SEPTEMBER 14, THE NOMINATION OF ALVARO GOMEZ HURTADO WAS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. HE HAD WORKED ASSIDUOUSLY DURING THE PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS TO BUILD DELEGATE STRENGTH AND ENSURE HIS NOMINATION AND BY LATE 1972 ALL BUT A FEW CONSERVATIVE LEADERS WERE CONVINCED OF HIS EVENTUAL SELECTION. SO SKILLFUL WAS HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THE NOMINATION THAT BY THE TIME THE CONVENTION OPENED ALL SERIOUS OPPOSITION TO HIS CANDIDACY HAD COLLAPSED.

2. THERE ARE THOSE IN THE PARTY WHO BELIEVE GOMEZ IS TOO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED IN THE MINDS OF BOTH LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES
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WITH THE REPRESSIVE MEASURES OF HIS FATHER, FORMER PRESIDENT LAUREANO GOMEZ, EITHER TO ENTHUSE LARGE NUMBERS OF VOTERS OR

TO INDUCE LIBERALS AND ANAPISTAS TO CROSS PARTY LUBES. NOR IS GOMEZ A CHARISMATIC FIGURE; HE IS RATHER A METHODICAL POLITICAL STRATEGIST WHO PLANS CAREFULLY AND EXPLOITS OPPORTUNITIES AS THEY ARISE. HIS DETRACTORS IN BOTH THE CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL PARTIES HAVE TRIED TO SADDLE HIM WITH A REACTIONARY IMAGE, BUT BY AND LARGE HAVE FAILED BECAUSE GOMEZ HAS BEEN ASTUTE ENOUGH TO ADOPT A PLATFORM THAT INCLUDES DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH REDISTRIBUTION OF INCOME AND SUPPORT FOR LABOR AND OTHER GROUPS. IN HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AT THE CONVENTION ON SEPTEMBER 14, GOMEZ SAID IF ELECTED HE WILL ADHERE STRICTLY TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION WHICH REQUIRES THAT ALL NON-CIVIL SERVICE JOBS BE DIVIDED EQUALLY BETWEEN LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES. HE ALSO PLEDGED POLITICAL TOLERANCE AND CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE LIBERAL PARTY. THE LIBERAL PRESS, CONCERNED OVER THE LOSS OF THE ONLY CONSERVATIVE OGRE REMAINING TO IT, COMMENTED EDITORIALY THAT IT SOUNDED TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

3. THE EUPHORIA SURROUNDING THE ACCLAMATION OF GOMEZ AT THE CONVENTION MASKED A NUMBER OF SERIOUS INTERNAL PARTY PROBLEMS. BERTHA DE OSPINA, WIFE OF THE EX-PRESIDENT, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL CONSERVATIVE DIRECTORATE AND CHAIRWOMAN OF THE CONVENTION, RAN PROCEEDINGS WITH AN IRON HAND AND REFUSED TO ALLOW ANY DISSIDENT VOICES TO BE HEARD ON THE FLOOR. AS WE REPORTED IN OUR TELEGRAM 7203 OF AUG 31, 1973, DONA BERTHA'S ACTIONS HAVE AROUSED A GOOD DEAL OF IRE, ESPECIALLY AMONG "PROGRESSIVE" CONSERVATIVES WHO FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN SHUT OUT OF PARTY DECISIONS AND JOBS. THE CONVENTION NAMED TWO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES TO THE NEW NATIONAL DIRECTORATE BUT THEY MAY REFUSE TO SERVE UNLESS THEY OBTAIN ASSURANCES OF A GREATER VOICE IN PARTY AFFAIRS AND IN THE CONTENT OF THE DISCUSSION OF ISSUES DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

4. SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE THE CONVENTION GOMEZ MET PRIVATELY WITH BELISARIO BETANCUR, THE BEST KNOWN OF THE PROGRESSIVES AND A 1970 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WHO GARNERED ALMOST 500,000 VOTES, MOST OF THEM FROM THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASSES. THE MEETING WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY A THIRD PARTY WHO WAS TRYING TO GET THE TWO MEN TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING IN THE INTERESTS OF PARTY UNITY. BETANCUR SAID HE WANTED THREE THINGS FROM GOMEZ IN RETURN FOR HIS
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ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CAMPAIGN: (A) A THREE-MAN NATIONAL DIRECTORATE IN WHICH BETANCUR WOULD PARTICIPATE, (B) MORE SOCIAL CONTENT IN THE PARTY PLATFORM WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON REDISTRIBUTION OF INCOME; (C) PROHIBITION ON NATIONAL DIRECTORATE MEMBERS RUNNING FOR ELECTIVE OFFICE. ACCORDING TO FRIENDS OF BETANCUR, GOMEZ SEEMED RECEPTIVE, BUT A PROPOSED SECOND MEETING NEVER CAME OFF. GOMEZ IS TOO BEHOLDEN TO DONA BERTHA AND THE OLD LINE REGULARS TO BE ABLE TO ACCEDE ENTIRELY TO THE BETANCUR FORMULA, WITNESS THE NEW FIFTEEN MEMBER NATIONAL DIRECTORATE; IN A CONCILIATORY GESTURE GOMEZ DID, HOWEVER, EASE IN A REFERENCE

TO INCOME REDISTRIBUTION IN HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH.

5. WHILE DONA BERTHA AND THE PARTY REGULARS MAINTAIN THEY DO NOT
NEED BETANCUR AND HIS ILK, THE FACT REMAINS THAT GOMEZ WILL
NEED ALL THE VOTES HE CAN GET TO BEAT A UNITED LIBERAL PARTY.
THE REGULARS SAY THAT DILUTING THE PLATFORM WITH
TOO MUCH SOCIAL CONTENT WOULD RUN THE RISK OF BECOMING CONFUSED WITH
THE LIBERAL AND ANAPO CANDIDATES AND LOSING LARGE NUMBERS OF
CONSERVATIVE VOTERS TO APATHY. GOMEZ IS GOING TO FIND IT DIFFICULT
TO RECONCILE THE DIFFERING CURRENTS IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY;
FOR THE MOMENT, THE REGULARS ARE HAPPY, BUT NOW THAT GOMEZ
HAS THE NOMINATION HE MAY TRY HARDER TO GET THE PROGRESSIVES
BEHIND HIS CANDIDACY.

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